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# FACTSHEET

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

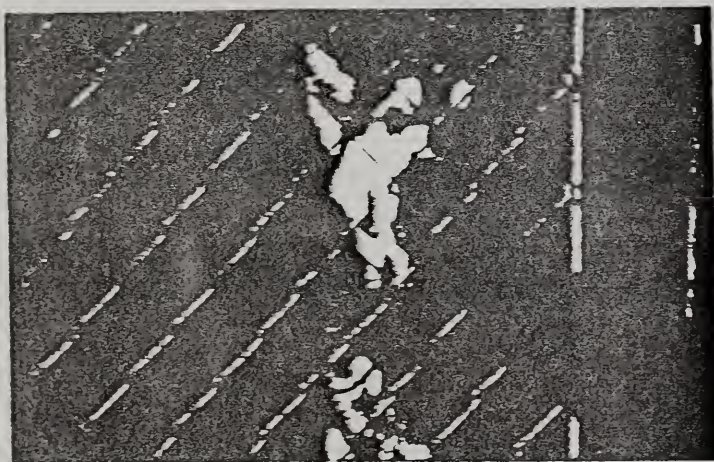
March 1995

## *Regulatory Enforcement and Animal Care*

### Safeguarding Pets

Many people believe that pet thieves cruise neighborhoods and steal dogs and cats for profit. The thieves could then sell the stolen animals to animal dealers and research facilities that are licensed or registered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Although the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) protects animals in certain situations, the crime of stealing pets does not fall under the purview of the AWA. Local laws apply to the theft of pets.

The AWA does discourage pet theft, however, by requiring licensed animal dealers to keep records that help trace lost and stolen dogs and cats. USDA, APHIS, enforces the AWA. By understanding what this law can and can't do, pet owners can become aware of how they can assist USDA in detecting pet theft.



### Federal Efforts To Safeguard Pets From Theft

The recordkeeping requirement of the AWA mandates that federally licensed or registered businesses, institutions, or agencies record the names and addresses of all people selling them dogs or cats. These businesses must keep records showing each animal's identifying number and description. Animal dealers must hold all dogs or cats they acquire for at least 5 days. Pounds and shelters supplying dogs and cats to research facilities must hold the animals 5 days including a Saturday. These requirements are intended to facilitate tracing of lost or stolen pets.

APHIS inspects animal dealers and research facilities at least once a year for compliance with the AWA regulations and standards. APHIS inspectors check the accuracy

of records by comparing them with the records kept by other dealers in the same marketing chain. While this recordkeeping system does not prevent all pet theft, it discourages thieves from selling stolen pets through market channels.

### Owner Efforts To Safeguard Pets From Theft

Responsible pet ownership is a critical key in securing your pet's safekeeping. While APHIS inspectors do their part to prevent pet theft, the APHIS Animal Care staff suggests that pet owners can protect their dogs or cats from loss or theft by following these recommendations:

- **Provide identification.** Tattoo and tag your pet. Tattoos can't get lost and are difficult to alter. Microchipping is another option. Contact your veterinarian or local humane shelter for a safe animal tattoo or microchip. If possible, tattoo your social security number on the inner thigh of your pet. Collar tags should provide your name, address, and telephone number. Jot down your pet's identifying marks, plus its color, breed, and size. Take a clear, closeup color photograph.
- **Restrain pets.** Keep cats and dogs inside. Put dogs outside only in fenced yards for limited time periods. Leash or harness your animals. Keep dogs and cats from roaming by neutering them at the age your veterinarian recommends—usually about 6 months.
- **Know your allies.** Prepare and keep handy a current list of persons who can help you find a lost or stolen pet. List the phone numbers of local pounds, shelters, and other animal collection centers. Add newspaper offices, radio and TV stations that have lost-and-found departments, as well as police, sheriffs, dog wardens, and other officials who might help locate a lost or stolen pet.
- **Contact APHIS Animal Care sector offices.** These sector offices, in Annapolis, MD, Sacramento, CA, Fort Worth, TX, and Tampa, FL, can provide you with a list of animal dealers and registered research facilities in your area. Provide these dealers and research facilities with pictures and information about your pets if they become lost.
- **Act promptly.** Start looking for a missing pet immediately. Tracing becomes more difficult as memories dim. Search your neighborhood frequently. Canvass your neighborhood with lost-pet pictures, signs, and information. Ask local neighbors and children to be on the lookout for your missing pet.

- **Don't give up.** Keep looking for more than a few days. Strays sometimes return to their old neighborhood days or even weeks after you first miss them.

## **Owner Responsibilities**

Avoid having unwanted pets on your hands. Don't get a pet unless your family can take care of it. Be sure a specific family member will be responsible for the overall well-being of the animal. Choose a pet that will suit your family now—and in the future. If you can no longer care for your pet, find another home with people who will care for it properly.

Should you decide to place a "free to good home" advertisement, interview the intended recipient, secure accurate identification (including address and telephone number), and make followup inquiries to assure that your pet is placed in an appropriate, permanent new home. We urge that, before advertising, you contact your local humane society or animal shelter for ways to safeguard your pet from being fraudulently obtained for other purposes.

Don't abandon the animal to a random death. The most humane alternative is to give the animal to a shelter or have a veterinarian end its life painlessly.

APHIS welcomes information about possible AWA violations from the public. Anyone having this information should contact his or her nearest APHIS sector office or contact:

**REAC**  
**APHIS, USDA**  
4700 River Road, Unit 84  
Riverdale, MD 20737